

Restoring Anadromous Fish Habitat in Big Canyon Creek Watershed

Anadromous Fish Habitat Restoration in the Nichols Canyon Subwatershed

**Annual Report
1999**



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**Restoring Anadromous Fish Habitat in
Big Canyon Creek Watershed;
Anadromous Fish Habitat Restoration in the
Nichols Canyon Subwatershed**

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NICHOLS CANYON SUBWATERSHED STEELHEAD TROUT HABITAT IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

1999 SUMMARY REPORT

BPA Intergovernmental Contract No. 00000631-00001, Project No. 99-15

INTRODUCTION

Nez Perce Soil & Water Conservation District (NPSWCD) undertook the Nichols Canyon Subwatershed Steelhead Trout Habitat Improvement Project in the spring of 1999. This Project is funded through a grant provided by the Bonneville Power Administration. The Project's purpose is to install and implement agricultural best management practices (BMPs) and riparian restorations to improve steelhead trout spawning and rearing habitat in the Nichols Canyon subwatershed of Big Canyon Creek. Improvements to spawning and rearing habitat in lower Big Canyon Creek tributaries will enhance natural production of the species in Big Canyon Creek and ultimately the Clearwater River. The following report is a summation of the activities undertaken by the NPSWCD in the first year of the project.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

Objective 1: Develop Project Plans

Project plans were developed during the period through December 31, 1999. The following decisions were made during that time:

- A short list of 100% cost-share BMPs to be installed using BPA project funds includes ponds, sediment basins, terrace/diversions, culvert erosion control practices, and riparian tree plantings. An additional list of practices installed at 75% cost-share includes water & sediment control basins, grassed waterways, spring developments, and other off-site livestock watering facilities.
- The NPSWCD adopts Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) standards and specifications for practices undertaken in the project.
- Project applications are ranked according to proximity to stream, relative benefit of practice to project goals, and practice feasibility.
- Projects are addressed on a fund-available basis according to the ranking list priority.
- Practices that are 100% cost-share are to be installed by an NPSWCD-approved contractor. Practices that are 75% cost-share may be installed by any contractor or the landowner/operator themselves.
- On June 10 the NPSWCD determined that all arrangements with contractors for the installation of practices would be made by participating landowners/operators. On December 16 the procedure was amended such that the NPSWCD will be responsible

for retaining contractors for 100% cost-share BMP installation. The procedure for 75% cost-share practices will remain unchanged.

Objective 2: Initiate Landowner/Operator Participation in the Project

During April and May, NPSWCD personnel met with interested landowners and completed on-site reviews of project proposals. The proposals were then ranked according to the NPSWCD's ranking process. Letters were sent to all applicants notifying them of their project's status on the ranking list. On May 24, the NPSWCD hired a Resource Conservationist to coordinate the Nichols Canyon project.

Objective 3: Complete BMP Plans and Ensure Regulatory Compliance

Status of Project Plans

On June 8 the project Resource Conservationist began meeting with landowners and operators to complete resource inventories for land units enrolled in the project. These inventories consist of a complete review of resource problems and landowner/operator needs on a land unit. Information collected from these resource inventories is used to develop conservation plans and project contracts with landowners and operators. Resource inventories were completed for all participating landowners/operators in November. Project contracts are established between landowners and the NPSWCD for BMP implementation. NPSWCD-landowner contracts that use BPA funds are assigned contract numbers beginning with the code "BPA". Two project contracts were signed in September between the NPSWCD and participating landowners.

Contract number BPA9901 includes enhancements to a riparian corridor in a grazed pasture. The corridor will be fenced to exclude livestock with 2 armored livestock crossings installed across the stream. A livestock watering area will be installed on the north side of the stream that will use a solar facility to pump water from the stream into a trough located outside the fenced area. Riparian trees will be planted inside the fence to stabilize the streambank and provide shade to the stream.

Contract number BPA9902 has scheduled 2 ponds for installation in the fall of 2000 as well as 4 existing pond restorations also scheduled for fall 2000. The 2 new ponds will be located in draws draining into Bear Creek, a northern tributary of Big Canyon Creek and will include livestock watering facilities. The ponds will function to retain water in the watershed, trap sediment before it enters the creek, and provide water to livestock which might otherwise seek out water in riparian corridors.

Contract number BPA9903 has been written and is currently under review. The contract plans call for the installation of 3 culvert erosion control structures, 3 water & sediment control structures, 1 pond, 1 sediment basin, and a network of grassed waterways. This is

an extensive plan to control sediment transport to an ephemeral stream corridor running through cropland.

Contract number BPA9904 was signed in November. Three grassed waterways were shaped and seeded in November as a part of that contract. These waterways form a network to channel water from the surrounding cropped hillsides and transport it to an outlet in an adjoining pastured draw, which drains into Bear Creek. Contract BPA9904 also has scheduled for installation in 2000, a livestock-watering pond, 2 water & sediment control basins, and an existing pond restoration.

Contract number BPA9905 has been written and is currently under review. The contract plans call for the installation of a pond in a forested draw below cropland. The pond will trap sediment, retain water, and provide water to wildlife in the draw. The contract also includes conifer plantings in 2 partially forested draws and the restoration of an existing pond.

Status of Project Engineering Designs

Project designs were completed in 1999 for 3 ponds scheduled for installation in 2000 and 3 grassed waterways, which were installed in fall 1999. The remaining project designs are scheduled to be completed by May 2000.

Project Regulatory Compliance Status

The following steps have been taken to ensure project regulatory compliance:

- Biological Assessments of the project were completed and submitted in September.
- The BPA NEPA Compliance Checklist was completed and sent to the BPA NEPA Coordinator on August 17. The project is currently awaiting notification from the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), establishing their concurrence on the Big Canyon Creek Biological Assessment. After concurrence is received, the BPA NEPA Coordinator will complete a Supplemental Analysis for the project, to complete the NEPA compliance process.
- Clean Water Act (CWA) 404 stream alteration permit applications have been submitted for 3 ponds scheduled for installation in 2000 to the Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) and the Idaho Department of Water Resources (IDWR). Notification to proceed has been received for 2 of the permit applications from the ACOE. The permit applications are currently being reviewed by the IDWR.
- Cultural resource survey requests have been submitted to the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) for 47 proposed projects to date. Of those submitted, 3 projects required a cultural resource survey. The surveys found no cultural resources present and were given approval to proceed by SHPO.

Interagency Cooperation

The NPSWCD is coordinating with several local, state, and federal agencies in facilitating this project. These agencies include the NRCS, NMFS, US Forest Service, BLM, Idaho Department of Fish & Game, Idaho Division of Environmental Quality, Idaho Department of Lands (IDL), Nez Perce Tribe, City of Peck, and Nez Perce County Commissioners.

On November 30, the project Conservationist met with a Forester from the IDL to assess a project tree-planting site. The proposed plan will include planting trees in a forested riparian area to improve the long-term health of the area. The IDL will provide guidance to the project landowner in the selection of trees and planting methods.

The NPSWCD has written a contract with the Nez Perce County Commissioners to improve a wildlife area above Big Canyon Creek using the combined resources of the BPA project and the Wildlife Habitat Improvement Project (WHIP). The project will involve the removal of an old forest road that currently acts as a direct sediment source to the creek, as well as construction of a small wildlife pond and planting trees.

Objective 4: Supervise and Inspect Installation of BMPs

In November 1999 installation of 3 grassed waterways was completed as a part of contract number BPA9904. The landowner installed the waterways himself, according to the NPSWCD's 75% cost-share procedure. The waterways were inspected by the project Conservationist following construction and were found to meet specifications.

The bulk of BMP installation will take place in 2000. Obstacles to installation in year 1 of the project have included a shortage of available contractors and limited availability of engineering design assistance. Solutions to these obstacles for year 2 of the project include:

1. amendments to the NPSWCD's contracting procedure for 100% cost-share practices, allowing more efficient use of available contractors; and
2. making use of the winter/spring off-season and scheduling engineering design assistance far in advance of projected construction dates.

Objective 5: Project Monitoring

BMP effectiveness monitoring is ongoing for the project and includes photo documentation of project sites before and after installation. These photos will be used to assess the long-term success of the practices following installation.

In September 1999, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) conducted a fish population estimate survey in the Nichols Canyon project area.

Water quality monitoring in the project area is ongoing and is a cooperative effort of the BLM, the Nez Perce Tribe, and the Idaho Association of Soil Conservation Districts (IASCD). The NPSWCD has monitored stream temperature in the upper portion of the watershed since October in conjunction with a flood mitigation project undertaken by the NPSWCD in cooperation with the Nez Perce County Commissioners and the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Objective 6: Documentation and Report Writing

Quarterly reports of project status were sent to BPA throughout year 2 of the project. Quarterly reporting will continue through 2001 and a project final report will be submitted to BPA in January 2001.